

# *Saint Raymund Nonnatus*

## *Cardinal and Confessor*





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*(Author Unknown)*

**COVER ART:** “*Saint Nonnatus Fed by Angels*” by Spanish painter, Eugenio Caxés (1575–1634) in 1630. \*



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ACCORDING to the words of our Divine Redeemer, that Christian proves he is God's most faithful disciple and gives the surest and greatest proof of his love of God, when he most perfectly loves his neighbor for God's sake. We are able to form our judgment of Saint Nonnatus by this same test.

Saint Raymund was brought into the world at Portel in Catalonia in the year 1204. He was called *non natus*, "not born," because he was taken out of the body of his mother after her death in labor. In his childhood, he seemed to find no other pleasure than in his devotions and his grammar studies. His father took him from school and sent him to take care of a farm that he owned in the country. Raymund readily obeyed and enjoyed the opportunity of solitude.

He was pressed by his friends to go to the court of Arragon, where by his prudence and abilities he could not fail to better himself, especially as he was related to the illustrious houses of Foix and Cardona. Instead of doing this, he made a resolution to take the religious habit in the new order of Our Lady of Mercy for the redemption of captives. With holy Job, he could say that compassion for the poor and distressed had grown in him as he had grown from childhood. The sufferings of the Christians almost under his eyes, who in the neighboring provinces groaned in slavery under the Moors, particularly afflicted his heart. Because he was so compassionate, Raymund already bore their burdens and felt the weight of their chains. But, if he was moved at their bodily sufferings and desired to devote himself and all that he possessed to procure them comfort and relief, he was much more troubled by their spiritual danger of sinking under their calamities and losing their souls by impatience or apostasy from Christ. Against this, he never ceased to pray, entreating the God of mercy to be Himself the comfort and support of the weak and of the strong. With Saint Paul, Raymund wished to spend and be spent himself for their souls. Through the mediation of the Count of Cardona, Raymund obtained leave of his father to enter the Mercedarian order. He was accordingly admitted to his profession at Barcelona by Saint Peter Nolasco.

Raymund's progress in the perfection of his institute was so swift that within two or three years after his profession he was judged the best qualified to discharge the office of "ransomer," in which he succeeded Saint Peter. He was sent into Barbary with a considerable sum of money, where he purchased the liberty of a number of slaves at Algiers. When all other resources were exhausted, he voluntarily gave himself up as a hostage for the ransom of others whose situation was desperate and whose faith was exposed to imminent danger.

The sacrifice Saint Nonnatus made of his own liberty served only to exasperate the Algerians and they treated him with barbarity. Fearing, if Raymund died in their hands, they would lose the ransom stipulated to be paid for the slaves for whom he remained a hostage, the magistrate of the city ordered that he should be treated with more humanity. Raymund was then permitted to go about the streets. He made use of this liberty to comfort and encourage the Christians and he converted and baptized some Mohammedans. When the governor heard of this, he condemned him to be impaled (a barbarous manner of executing criminals much in use among those infidels). However, those who were interested in the ransom of the captives prevailed that his life should be spared lest they should be losers. His punishment was commuted and he was made to run the gauntlet.

This did not daunt Raymund's courage. As long as he saw souls in danger, he thought he had yet done nothing. He could not pass up any opportunity to minister to those souls in need. He considered that, as Saint John Chrysostom says, "Though a person shall have given away a large fortune in alms he has done nothing equal to him who has contributed to the salvation of a soul. This is a greater alms than ten thousand pounds—than this whole world, however great it appears to the eye—for a man is more precious than the whole world."

Saint Raymund had, on one side, no more money to employ in releasing poor captives and, on the other, Islamic law that to speak to a Mohammedan upon the subject of religion was to court death. He could, therefore, still exert his endeavors hoping for some success or expecting to die a martyr of charity. He resumed his former method of instructing and exhorting both Christians and infidels. The governor was immediately told of his behavior. Enraged, he commanded that the servant of Christ was to be whipped at the corners of all the city streets, his lips bored with a red-hot iron in the market-place, and his mouth shut up with a padlock. The governor kept the key and only gave it to the jailer when the prisoner was to eat. Saint Raymund Nonnatus was kept in a dungeon in this condition for eight months, until his ransom was brought by some religious men of his order, who were sent by Saint Peter. Raymund was unwilling to leave the country of the infidels where he wanted to assist the slaves, but he acquiesced in obedience to the orders of his general, begging God to accept his tears, seeing he was not worthy to shed his blood for the souls of his neighbors.

Upon his return to Spain in 1239, Pope Gregory IX nominated him cardinal. But Saint Raymund Nonnatus was so little affected by the unlooked-for honor that he did not change his clothing, his poor cell in the convent at Barcelona, or his manner of living. The Pope, wishing to have so holy a man about his person and to employ him in the public affairs of the Church, called him to Rome. Saint Nonnatus obeyed, but he could not be persuaded to travel in any manner other than as a poor religious. He got no further



than Cardona (Cerdagne), which is only six miles from Barcelona, when he was seized with a violent fever and died there. He was only about thirty-six years old. He was buried in the chapel of Saint Nicholas, near the farm where he had formerly lived at Portello.

The life of Saint Raymund Nonnatus was not written down until hundreds of years after his death and it is a task of great difficulty to separate truth from fiction in the document that has come down to us. It is adorned with numerous miracles and other marvels of some doubtful worth. He is the patron saint of midwives.

Saint Raymund Nonnatus gave not only his substance but also his liberty and exposed himself to cruel torments and death for the redemption of captives and the salvation of souls. Thus, Saint Raymund Nonnatus passed the test, proving to be a most faithful disciple of God. He gave the surest and greatest proof of his love of God, when he loved others for God's sake.

We are able to form our judgment of ourselves by this same test. How cold is charity in *our* breasts, though it is the essential characteristic of true Christians? Do we not, merely to gratify our desire for pleasure or out of vanity or avarice, refuse to give the superfluous part of our possessions to the poor, who, for want of it, suffer from cold and hunger? Are we not slothful and backward in visiting unfortunate or sick persons, thus offering some relief for the distressed? Are we so insensible to their miseries that we have no heartfelt feeling for them and even neglect to commend them to God with sufficient earnestness? Do we not fail to remonstrate with sinners according to our circumstances and with regard for prudence, and neglect to instruct, by ourselves and others, those under our care? Is it not obvious that self-love, and not the love of God and our neighbor, reigns in our hearts when we pursue our own worldly interest so inordinately? If we look into our own hearts and take an impartial view of our lives, we shall soon know if we pass the Divine Savior's test or if we are passing Satan's test, which is self-love. Which is uppermost in our souls? Which is the governing principle of our actions?

*Saint Raymund Nonnatus,*

*Pray for Us!*

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